855. f. 16 (9)

10 V. e 11 Bellers 6 J.

An EPISTLE *to Friends of the Yearly, Quarterly, and Monthly Meetings; concerning the Priſoners, and* Sick, *in the Priſons, and Hoſpitals of* Great-Britain.

Dear Friends,

THE Multitude that are confind in the Priſons and Jayles of this Nation, both Debtors as well as Criminals; and the Sick in the Hoſpitals are very numerous, and the Miſeries and Diſtreſſes of many of them very great.

And how ready and earneſt diſtreſt Souls are frequently to ſeek after God, and at Times to give Ear to Advice, when any Labour of Love may be beſtowed upon them, in their ſolitary Confinements, is well ſet forth in ſeveral Places of the Scriptures.

Hoſea v. ver. 15. *In their Affliction they will ſeek me early.*

Pſal. cxix. ver. 67. *Before I was afflicted I went aſtray, but now have I kept thy Word.*

——ver. 71. *It is good for me that I have been afflicted; that I might learn thy Statutes.*

——ver. 75. *I know O Lord, that thy Judgments are right, and that thou in Faithfulneſs hath afflicted me.*

It may procure a large Harveſt among them, there being Inſtances of ſeveral reached, tho' they were great Offenders. The Caſe of a young Woman at or nigh *Ipſwich*, committed to Priſon for Murdering of her baſtard Child, and tried before Judge *Hales*, was a very remarkable one, as mentioned in *W. Sewell*'s Hiſtory fol. 476. Who being convinced of the great Evil of her Actions by the ſeaſonable Advice which was given by ſome Friends to her: That tho' the Judge (underſtanding of her great Penitence) ſhew'd a Deſire to ſave her, as alſo did ſome Friends; yet ſhe rather chooſe to dye in that Diſpoſition of Mind that ſhe was then in, than hazard relapſing by a longer Life into any further Evil. And our Friend *Richard Aſhby* hath writ of ſome others which he lately viſited, and alſo a Friend ſince made a very acceptable Viſit to a Patient in *Bartholomews* Hoſpital.

Will it not be a Day of great Joy to many and an awakening of them out of their Lethargy of Sin, when they ſhall be told that our bleſſed Saviour who went and Preached to the Spirits in Priſon, Preaches to them in their Priſons, and ſtands at the Door of their Hearts, ready to enter in; if they ſhall open the everlaſting G[illegible]

of their Souls, He will come into them and ſup with them, and they with him.

By true Repentance, and after their having ſuffered many Afflictions, as *Lazarus* had; tho' they ſhould not be reſtored to their Liberties, or Healths in this Life, yet they may find a happy reſt in *Abraham*'s Boſom in another World, which may occaſion that Bleſſing to their Benefactors mentioned,

Matt. xxv. *ver.* 34. *Come ye bleſſed of my Father inherit the Kingdom prepared for you.*

——*ver.* 35. *For I was an hungred, and ye gave me Meat: I was thirſty and ye gave me Drink: I was a Stranger and ye took me in,*

——*ver.* 36. *Naked and ye clothed me: I was ſick, and ye viſited me: I was in Priſon, and ye came unto me.*

——*ver.* 40. *Verily I ſay unto you, in as much as ye have done it unto ONE of the leaſt of theſe my Brethren, ye have done it unto me.*

Can there be any ſtronger Obligations or Encouragements (then theſe are) to have Regard to the Afflicted, and to ſeek out ſuch loſt Sheep of the Houſe of *Iſrael*, under their various Circumſtances.

Among the many Thouſands that are and may be in the Priſons and Hoſpitals who can tell how many of thoſe little ones mentioned to be ſo much eſteemed of God, may be among them?

Whoſe ſecret Cries in their Souls to God (under their great Diſtreſs) for his Salvation and the Knowledge of his Way, may be a Means to procure to many of them Acceptance with Him, tho' unknown to Men, (ſuch being ripe for the Harveſt.) There being many Promiſes to the afflicted who ſhall ſincerely ſeek after God. †

And therefore they are worthy to be viſited and ſought after, in their Deplorable Habitations.

A Word at ſuch a Seaſon may be like Apples of Gold in Pictures of Silver, and as to a hungry Man every bitter Thing is ſweet, ſo to ſuch

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† Iſa. liv. *ver.* 11. *O thou afflicted, toſſed with Tempeſt, and not comforted, behold I will lay thy Stones with fair Colours, and lay thy Foundations with Sapphers.*

Pſal. xviii. 27. *For thou wilt ſave the afflicted People; but wilt bring down high looks.*

Micah. iv. 6. *In that Day, ſaith the Lord, will I aſſemble her that halteth, and I will gather her that is driven out, and her that I have afflicted,*

——*ver.* 7. *And I will make her that halteth a Remnant, and her that was caſt far off, a ſtrong Nation; and the Lord ſhall reign over them in Mount Zion, from henceforth even for ever.*

Nahum i. 12. *Thus ſaith the Lord——Tho' I have afflicted thee, I will afflict thee no more.*

Zeph. xxx. 12. *I will leave in the midſt of thee an afflicted and poor People, and they ſhall truſt in the Name of the Lord.*

Pſal. xxii. 24. *For he hath not diſpiſed, nor abhored the Affliction of the afflicted, neither hath he hid his Face from him, but when he cried unto him he heard.*

ſuch afflicted Souls the ſtammering Tongue will be very acceptable, tho' poſſibly many others may be like the Swine that will trample Pearles under their Feet, but the good Sower was not ſtopt in his Work, tho' much of his Seed was loſt by falling upon Stony, Thorny, and Highway Ground.

Where much is forgiven they will love much: *Oneſimus* tho' an unfaithful Servant, yet on Repentance he became a beloved Brother.

Our Saviour made uſe of ſome of his laſt Moments (at his Crucifiction) to comfort the afflicted (tho' a very great Criminal) on the Confeſſion of his Sins, and humble requeſt to be remembred by Him when he came into his Kingdom.

Luke xxiii. 43. *And Jeſus ſaid unto him, verily I ſay unto thee, to Day ſhalt thou be with me in Paradiſe.*

On which Conſiderations I propoſe that as any Friends ſhall find Openings in their Minds ſutable to the States and Circumſtances of thoſe unhappy People, That they would viſit them, and I believe that ſome of thoſe dry Bones will be raiſed to Life.

Second, To make them the more ready to hear what Advice may be given unto them, I propoſe that at the Time of the Yearly Meeting, once a Year they in the Priſons only, (that are in Want) ſhall be treated with a Dinner of baked Legs and Shins of Beef, and Ox Cheeks; which is a rich and yet cheap Diſh, with which they may be treated plentifully for 4*d.* a Head (or leſs.) And if there ſhould be a Thouſand of them, the whole Charge will not be above 16*l.* 13*s.* 4*d.* a Year.

Our Saviour fed the Multitude but twice in three Years and a half, (which was the Time of his Miniſtry) that we have an Account of, yet it was enough to ſhew, that it was uſeful to draw a Multitude of Auditors: And that tho' they might come for the Sake of the Loaves, more than the Miracle; yet by that Means there was Opportunity for him, to Preach the Goſpel unto them.

By which they were brought to enquire,

John vi. 28. *What they ſhould do that they might work the Works of God.* To which Jeſus anſwer'd, *ver.* 29. ——*This is the Work of God, That ye believe on him whom he hath ſent.*

Third, I propoſe that there be Endeavours to Help them to ſome Work ſuitable to every one's Capacity and Ability, that their Room will admit of. Which Earning as it will be a good Addition to their Subſiſtance whilſt confind, It may alſo lead them into an Induſtrious Way of Living, when they ſhall be ſet at Liberty. And prevent

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those Necessities which are some of the Enemies strongest Holds, and also of many evil Actions, which comes by Idleness, that being the Devil's great Opportunity for Temptation

Fourth, I propose that some good Advice and Information should be Printed in a broad Sheet, to be hanged up in the several Prisons, for their reading, and also that some suitable Treatises should be given among them.

The Northern Borders are a noted Instance of the good Effect that our Friends Labour of Love, had among those Robbers call'd Moss Troopers that were there, so far to reform that Country (where they murdered as well as robbed) that the then Earle of *Carlisle* told King *Charles* the Second, *That the* Quakers *had done more to suppress them than all his Troops could do.*

I have been informed that Friends have or had a Meeting in the midst of that Part of the Country.

Eusebius gives a remarkable Relation of the Apostle *John*'s reclaiming a young Man that run from his Tutor, and became the Captain of a Band of Robbers.

William Penn told me of a Fellon, that when he came to the Place of Execution said, *That nothing troubled him more than that he had robbed a* Quaker.

There was a foot Pad once stop'd a Friend of *Kensington*, but when he found him to be a *Quaker*, he said he could not robb him, but said he was poor, and therefore begged something of him. *

Every Man may esteem the Value of his Religion in proportion to the Love he finds towards God and his Neighbours, for on those depend all true Religion, and one of the greatest Marks that we sincerely love God is, when we use our Endeavours for the good and happiness one of another. †

The 12th of the 3d Month 1724.

BRITISH MUSEUM

John Bellers.

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* Isa. liv. *ver.* 11. *And if thou draw out thy Soul to the hungry, and satisfie the afflicted Soul: Then shall thy Light rise in Obscurity, and thy Darkness be as the noon Day.*
Job vi. 14. *To him that is afflicted Pity should be shewed from his Friend.*
Psal. xv. 25. *With the Merciful thou wilt shew thy self Merciful.*
1 Pet. ii. 21. *For even hereunto were we called; because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an Example, that ye should follow his Steps.*

† 1 John iv. 20. *For he that loveth not his Brother whom he hath seen, how can he love (the invisible) God whom he hath not seen.*

FINIS.